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DEPARTMENT FOR AF/PD (DBWHARTON, EKEMP, SANCHEZCROWE), AF/W
(ASTEWART)

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SUBJECT: AMBASSADOR KNIGHT'S COURTESY CALLS ON LOCAL BENINESE MEDIA
OUTLETS

1. SUMMARY: In order to familiarize himself with local media and establish good working relations with them, the Ambassador initiated a series of courtesy calls to meet the directors and to see the facilities and working conditions.

2. On December 7, the Ambassador hosted a meeting for three Directors of the Fraternite Group of media enterprises made up of a TV station, Canal 3; a radio station, Fraternite FM, and a print media outlet, Fraternite in his office. In his welcoming remarks, the Ambassador stressed the important role that media play in building a stable democracy and told the Directors how delighted he was to meet with them to learn more about them and their media outlets. Malick Gomina, Director of Fraternite Group of Media, told the Ambassador that they started their operations with print and followed three years later by radio and TV. Gomina mentioned that their media outlets are willing to cover events involving all political actors, including the members of the ruling party and the opposition.

3. Canal 3 operates by satellite and has an international audience. The group is planning to open an office in Paris, and for this reason, they must improve the quality of their productions, he said. Canal 3 has foreign partners such as VOA, BBC and an international radio station called Africa Number One. In an effort to garner Embassy assistance, Canal 3 Director Berthe Mensah Cakpossa pointed out the need for managerial and technical training for the administrative staff and the technicians. Cakpossa also mentioned that modern TV stations are now using digital equipment, but Canal 3 is not even prepared for that, so she asked for equipment donations, as well.

4. Gomina expressed his perception that it was difficult to get a visa to travel to the U.S. to purchase needed equipment for the station. The PAO briefly explained the referral process and offered to assist in facilitating the visa process for legitimate travel.

5. Referring specifically to the kind of assistance the Mission can provide, the Ambassador mentioned that he will look into the possibility of bringing a journalist to Benin to provide a week-long extensive training to journalists.

6. On December 8, the Ambassador visited the national press office, which operates the state-owned newspaper, La Nation. He also visited two private media outlets: Radio Tokpa and an independent daily newspaper, L'Autre Quotidien. At each location, the Ambassador noted that he wanted to visit them to observe the way they operate. At each of the sites visited, the Directors requested assistance in term of training of reporters. "When the journalists are well trained, they perform their duties in a professional manner and you have good programming," said Guy Kpakpo, Radio Tokpa's Director. Kpakpo also spoke about his desire to participate in an exchange program in the United States in order to learn how private radio stations are run. During the visit to La Nation and L'Autre Quotidien, the Ambassador was introduced to two former IV grantees and their Directors said they would appreciate it if more of their staff could receive such training opportunities in the United States.

In leading the Ambassador on a tour of the national press office, Director Akuete Assevi told the Ambassador that mosQjp/v\Q7. On December 15, the Ambassador visited the government-controlled Radio and Television Office of Benin(ORTB). The Director of the Office, Julien Pierre Akpaki, who was appointed by President Boni Yayi, thanked the Ambassador for visiting ORTB and presented a brief description of his office before taking the Ambassador and his delegation to tour the various operations. The Ambassador's visit to the newsroom coincided with the afternoon news cast, so the Ambassador gamely agreed to appear as a special guest and reported on his impressions of the news operation.

8. At the end of the tour, Akpaki made a plea for assistance in the form of equipment such as tape recorders and new computers. He also requested that the Embassy provide training to teach the journalists how to present the news during electoral periQypQ^R-session at the American Cultural Center in January.

9. On December 16, Ambassador Knight visited LC2, the first privately-owned TV station in Benin, founded in 1998. After giving a tour of the station, the LC2 Director seized the opportunity to explain the historical background of LC2, now on satellite, with a branch station in Paris and another one in New York. Visibly impressed by the quality of the equipment being used, the Ambassador

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congratulated the young LC2 team for the high quality of their product. Asked to comment about what LC2 can expect after this visit, the Ambassador promised to offer the station moral support and training sessions to prepare the journalists for the upcoming elections in 2011. The Ambassador reminded them of the importance of

the media and enjoined them to keep up the good work for the promotion of democracy and development.

¶10. Comment: Post will also be submitting a request for an SSI Speaker to Promote the development of independent media, open Internet access, and press freedom through programYFQE?e part of government and the broader society, and the use of online journalism and blogging.

¶11. Over the years, the U.S. Embassy has established good relations with the local media community but no Ambassador, in recent memory, had actually made a visit to the stations to tour their facilities. These visits were given extensive coverage on TV and in the print media. These goodwill visits will hopefully contribute to reinforcing these good relations and providing more visibility to the Mission's activities. End Comment.

Knight